UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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T U E S D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

- Security Council strongly condemns human rights violations in Croatia, urges Government to bring perpetrators to trial promptly.
- Secretary-General meets with Pope John Paul II in Rome; discusses United Nations financial crisis and critical situation in Africa with Italian Government leaders.
- Secretary-General pays tribute to former French President Mitterrand as leader who worked tirelessly for improvement of humanity.
- Secretary-General recommends UNOMIG mandate be extended to 12 July 1996.
- UNICEF expresses "profound concern" over reports of neglect and starvation in China's state orphanages.
- UNHCR airlift to Sarajevo ends after three and a half years.

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The Security Council has strongly condemned international humanitarian law and human rights violations, killings, systematic and widespread looting and arson in Croatia's former sectors North and South. In a statement yesterday, Council President Sir John Weston (United Kingdom) urged the Croatian Government to make every effort to arrest all perpetrators and bring them promptly to trial.

The Council said it was disturbed by the humanitarian and security situation of the mostly elderly Serbs who have remained in the former sectors. It expressed grave concern at reports of extensive harassment and intimidation, looting and other forms of abuse and reaffirmed its demand that the Government take urgent measures to stop such acts immediately.

The Council also reaffirmed its demand that the Croatian Government respect the rights of the local Serb population, including their right to remain, leave or return to their homes in safety and dignity, and urged the Government to refrain from measures which would adversely affect such rights. The Council also reaffirmed its call to the Government to lift any time-limits on the return of

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refugees to reclaim their property and noted that Croatia's decision on 27 December 1995 to suspend the deadline was a step in the right direction.

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In a keynote address to the Italian parliament today, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali spoke of the democratization of States, international society and the transnational community, according to a United Nations spokesman. On the second day of an official visit, the Secretary-General also stressed the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, citing the cases of El Salvador, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Somalia, Haiti and the former Yugoslavia.

Earlier, he met with Prime Minister Lamberto Dini for discussions on reform of the United Nations and its financial crisis, the critical situation in various African countries, United Nations sanctions in Iraq and Libya and the launching of a United Nations staff college in Turin. Earlier, the Secretary-General met with the Italian Defence Minister, General Domenico Corcione, who underlined the importance of the Organization's continued involvement in the former Yugoslavia.

At a meeting yesterday with His Holiness Pope John Paul II, the Secretary-General thanked the Pontiff for his continued moral support of the United Nations and its activities, the spokesman said. He was also the main speaker at an event hosted by the Mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli, and Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli, at which he focused on the importance of non-governmental organizations and the civil society. The Secretary-General is expected to leave for London tomorrow, where he will meet with Prime Minister John Major.

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Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali expressed deep sorrow and profound regret at the death yesterday of President Francois Mitterrand. He said the former French leader had worked tirelessly for the improvement of humanity, and his continuing international action, inspired by a humanist and world view, made him an ardent defender of the United Nations cause.

President Mitterrand had firmly committed his country to the protection of human rights, support of the rule of law and humanitarian operations in favour of suffering and vulnerable populations, the Secretary-General said. He sent his condolences to Mrs. Danielle Mitterrand, the French people and President Jacques Chirac.

Yesterday, the Security Council paid tribute to President Mitterrand. Council President Sir John Weston (United Kingdom) said the French leader had played a pivotal role in his country and the world's history. In a political life spanning five decades, he had been influential as a Cabinet Minister, political leader and statesman. He had also been a friend of the United Nations and a strong defender of its principles and objectives.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) be extended until 12 July 1996. In a report issued today, the Secretary-General said that the Security Council should review the extension if a meeting of the Council of the Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 19 January changed the mandate of the CIS peace-keeping force.

Despite strenuous efforts in recent months by the Russian Federation to draft a protocol, which would be acceptable to both sides to the conflict, there had been little progress, the Secretary-General said. The draft protocol's main objective was to establish a basic understanding of principles on which a more detailed agreement could be elaborated. However, ingredients for a solution were not yet present, and external factors were influencing the extent to which both sides were willing to compromise. They still needed outside assistance to find a lasting solution to their dispute.

The Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Edouard Brunner, and the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister were meeting today to consider ways to move the political process forward, the Secretary-General said. While not expected to lead to an early breakthrough, the meeting was another step in joint efforts by the United Nations and the Russian Federation to restore peace and stability to the region.

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The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has expressed profound concern over the findings of a Human Rights Watch report alleging that thousands of children are being allowed to die every year from medical neglect and starvation in China's state-run orphanages with the tacit approval of senior political leaders. According to UNICEF's Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, the agency is seeking clarification from the Chinese Government. "These are grave issues, and such actions would clearly contravene the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which China has ratified", she said.

The report, which was released on Monday, is entitled "Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages". It suggests that the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the Convention, place at the top of its agenda for the coming year, conditions in the Chinese child welfare system. The Chinese Government submitted its first implementation report on the Convention to the Committee in 1994, and thus voluntarily submitted itself to international monitoring on the treatment of its children. The UNICEF said it would press strongly for a continuation of this process.

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The final flights of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sarajevo airlift -- history's longest running humanitarian airbridge -- were scheduled to arrive in the Bosnian capital today. According to UNHCR Sadako Ogata, the airlift was a lifeline which saved tens of thousands of people and kept the city alive through three winters of war.

Ms. Ogata said, although the airlift passed many milestones, there was never a cause for celebration. Every day of war, siege and suffering meant another day of flying. She paid tribute to those who had died in the international effort and the thousands of people who had made it a success.

NOTE: The Daily Highlights was not published yesterday as United Nations Headquarters was closed due to severe weather conditions.

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